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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000480

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SUBJECT: BANGLADESH'S FIRST CONFIRMED CASE OF AVIAN
INFLUENZA IN POULTRY

REF: DHAKA 0117

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Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION GEETA PASI FOR REASON 1.4(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On March 22, Bangladesh announced its first confirmed case of Avian Influenza (H5N1). The GOB has taken preliminary steps to address the avian influenza infection discovered at a commercial poultry farm north of Dhaka. With NO/NO human infection in Bangladesh and NO/NO additional detection of H5N1 elsewhere in Bangladesh, the core focus is on speeding up the pace of Bangladesh's development in both animal and human surveillance capacity as a result of this first confirmed case of H5N1 poultry infection. END SUMMARY.

PUBLIC PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWS HIGH LEVEL MEETING

12. (U) According to an official press report, the Advisers for Health and Family Welfare, and for Agriculture, Fisheries and Livestock briefed the Chief Adviser and the other advisers on March 22 on a recent avian influenza outbreak at a commercial poultry farm north of Dhaka. By the evening of March 22, the news was being broadcast over local radio stations. Today's local newspapers are carrying the avian influenza story in the headlines.

IMMEDIATE ACTION

13. (C) Following the meeting of Advisers reported in the media, a meeting of technical experts may be convened soon, possibly as early as Saturday, March 24. Dr. Mosaddique Hossain, Chief Veterinary Surgeon, Central Veterinary Hospital, reported to the Ambassador that the GOB will execute a three mile radius culling of poultry around the epicenter commercial poultry farm. Press reports describe a ten kilometer cull radius, but either way this represents a sizeable area, and is an indicator that the GOB is taking this matter seriously. Dr. Hossain also reported GOB plans to pay compensation to farmers at the rate of 70 taka per chicken and 80 taka per other fowl (UD\$1 = approximately 70 taka). Market price for chickens in this area are approximately 70 taka per kilogram and most chickens range in weight from one to 1.5 kg, so this is relatively close to market price. The local currency equivalent of \$14.5 million (derived from the sale of USG donated food and agricultural commodities) is available to assist the GOB in meeting the short term and long term needs created by this first case of H5N1. The USG gave approval to use these resources in a variety of programs months ago, but GOB action is still

required to disburse these funds. In the short term, Post has identified the taka equivalent of \$5 million of these funds for use in this compensation plan. The Ambassador contacted the Finance Adviser today, March 23, to discuss their use. The utilization of these funds by the GOB has been blocked due to bureaucratic inertia and frequent staff changes in relevant ministries. The Finance Adviser told the Ambassador that he was very interested in these funds and would follow up within his ministry to ensure their release.

ANIMAL VS. HUMAN SURVEILLANCE

14. (C) In the first countries where H5N1 was found, the identification was primarily the result of investigating human deaths and then backwards plotting the virus, path to the poultry population, usually to backyard farms where individuals had close contact with the poultry. Now in Bangladesh, as with other countries more recently experiencing an initial outbreak of H5N1, we see at least some success in animal surveillance picking up the virus instead of waiting for human fatalities. Animal surveillance's effectiveness is still limited in Bangladesh, as indicated by the fact that Bangladesh's first incident was discovered as a result of a large die off in a commercial poultry farm. With 45% of the poultry in Bangladesh being raised in backyard farms, there is still a significant gap in animal surveillance. It is encouraging to note that Bangladesh did not wait for the first human death to be the initial tripwire.

INITIAL STUMBLES BY THE MINISTRY OF FISHERIES AND LIVESTOCK

15. (C) The Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock had the initial lead on investigating the die off as early as late February and did not share this information with other GOB agencies or international partners. It was only when

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Ministry of Health was informed some three weeks later, on March 15, when aggressive action was taken. From mid-March, the GOB gets reasonably good marks for sharing information both with appropriate international and domestic health agencies and with the public once confirmation of results came back from an FAO certified lab in Thailand. One specific example of that cooperation is that the GOB has fully shared the samples, which will allow FAO to sequence the virus and determine which particular strain of the virus is present in Bangladesh.

COMMENT

16. (C) There have been no reports of human infection in Bangladesh and no reports of additional detection of H5N1 elsewhere in the country. Therefore, following the immediate culling of the birds near the epicenter in Savar, the course of action should focus on increasing animal and human surveillance. The taka equivalent of \$14.5 million (which includes the amount already identified to compensate farmers for culled birds) is available for use in procuring detection and diagnostic equipment which would improve both animal and human surveillance capabilities. The Ambassador's communication with the Finance Advisor underscored both the availability of these funds and the need to process their disbursement expeditiously.

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